

Tuskegee Airmen

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Those air crew and ground crew personnel associated with black flying units of the Army Air Forces (AAF) during World War II are known as the Tuskegee Airmen. On 16 January 1941, Secretary of the Army Henry L. Stimson authorized the formation of a black pursuit squadron. The 99th Pursuit (later Fighter) Squadron was activated in March 1941 and began training in separate facilities at Tuskegee, Alabama, on 15 November. The 99th Squadron, equipped with Curtiss P-40s and later Bell P-39s, was sent to French Morocco in April 1943, and it continued combat service from bases in Tunisia, Sicily, and Italy. In February 1944, the 99th Squadron was joined by three other fighter squadrons, the 100th, the 301st, and the 302nd, and all four squadrons constituted the 332nd Fighter Group, commanded by Colonel (later Lieutenant General) Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. The group converted to Republic P-47s in April-May 1944 and to North American P-51s in June. Until the end of the war in Europe, it escorted Fifteenth Air Force bombers and made attacks on ground targets from its bases in Italy. The group earned a Distinguished Unit Citation for an escort mission to Berlin on 24 March 1945.

In mid-1943, the AAF decided to organize a black bomber unit, the 477th Bombardment Group (Medium). Activated on 1 June 1943, its pilots were to be trained at Tuskegee, but that airfield, already overburdened with training requirements, was unable to handle the new trainees. Rather than sending black student pilots to white-only schools or creating a new segregated base for them, the AAF delayed crews for the 477th Group until the backlog at Tuskegee could be cleared out. Since Tuskegee was not able to provide North American B-25 medium bomber pilot transition or training for bombardiers and navigators, eventually the AAF made an exception to its segregation policy and sent black officers to what had been all-white training establishments for their advanced instruction. Faced with discrimination and often treated with less respect than white officers, their training suffered. As a result of these mounting delays and difficulties, the group was not operational until after the war. Tuskegee was, however, the single school for instruction of black pilots until it closed in 1946. Its graduates, along with the other air and ground personnel trained there for the 477th Bombardment and 332nd Fighter Groups, are the Tuskegee Airmen.

Dr. Christopher Koontz, Historian, AFHSO.

This subject has received extensive treatment in written form and on the internet. A web search will yield a wealth of information. Links to get you started are:

[Tuskegee Airmen](#), National Museum of the U. S. Air Force.

Selected Books and Reports:

[Tuskegee Airmen Chronology](#) by Daniel L. Haulman, December 2015.

[Blacks in the Army Air Forces During World War II: The Problems of Race Relations](#) by Alan M. Osur. Office of Air Force History USAF, 1986.

[The Air Force Integrates 1954--1964](#), by Alan L. Gropmen. Office of Air Force History USAF, 1985 .

[Tuskegee \(Weather\) Airmen: Black Meteorologists in World War II](#). This journal article by Gerald A. White, Jr. appeared in the Summer 2006 *Air Power History*.

See this study published by the USAF School of Aerospace Medicine: [United States Army Aeromedical Support to African American Fliers; 1941-1949: The Tuskegee Flight Surgeons.](#)



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Members of the first pilot class at the advanced flying school at Tuskegee, Alabama, listening to their instructor, 1942.



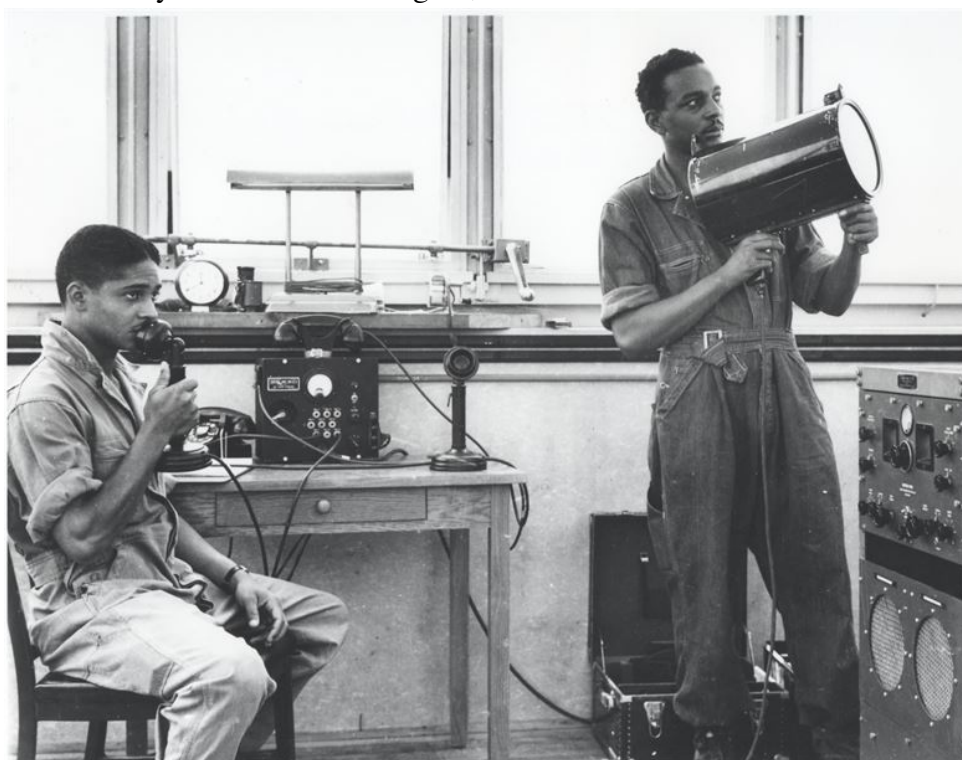
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Cadets in armament class study a 30 calibre machine gun, 1942.



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Cadets in ground school study a radial aircraft engine, 1942.





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Control tower support staff training at Tuskegee, Alabama, with microphone and biscuit gun, 1942



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Tuskegee Airmen in WWII



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Tuskegee Airman in P-51

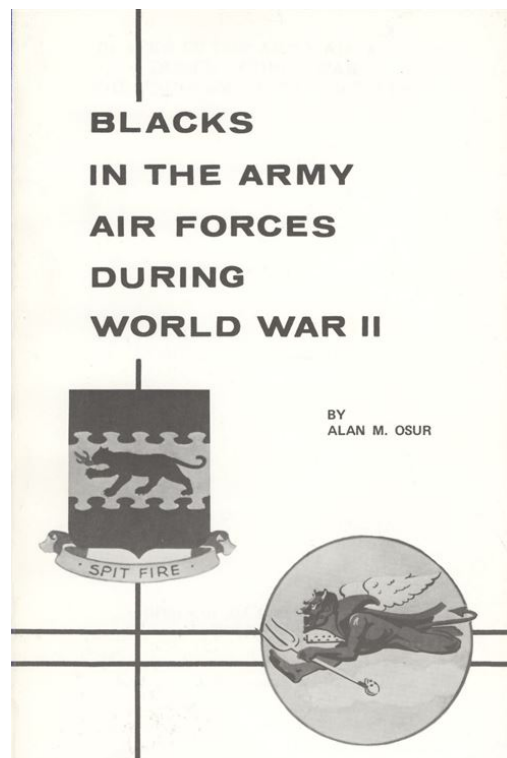




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by Alan M. Osur

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